

VP-4 Stands “Shoulder to Shoulder” with MF-30 during BALIKATAN 11

By LT Isaiah Gammache

On March 31st, 2011, a detachment from Commander, Task Group (CTG) 72.2 arrived in the Republic of the Philippines to participate in BALIKATAN 2011. One P-3C Orion aircraft and 29 Patrol Squadron FOUR (VP-4) personnel arrived from Kadena, Japan where they are currently deployed. BALIKATAN is a yearly exercise that plays an essential role in fostering interoperability and close cooperation between the allied armed forces of the United States and the Republic of the Philippines. The information shared between the two countries during this exercise has immediate applications in several mission areas including maritime surveillance, interdiction, amphibious maneuvers and humanitarian assistance.

With over 7,000 islands within its territorial border, the Philippine people rely heavily on Coastal Watch Stations and Philippine Naval Air Group aircraft to maintain their security, and monitor the actions of seaborne traffic. The P-3C Orion is the U.S. Navy’s premier maritime surveillance platform. Operating under the direction of Commander Task Force 72 in the SEVENTH Fleet Area of Responsibility (AOR), P-3 aircraft have a long history of providing critical intelligence on vessels operating in the open seas beyond the reach of ground stations and short-endurance aircraft. BALIKATAN 2011 provides the opportunity for the United States P-3 community to share lessons learned from many years of maritime surveillance while gaining new insight from their Philippine counterparts on the unique challenges of archipelagic security and defense.

BALIKATAN is a Tagalog word meaning “shoulder-to-shoulder” and it captures the essence of this combined exercise. The “Skinny Dragons” of VP-4 are rapidly developing close ties to their Philippine peers within Multi-Purpose Fixed Wing Squadron THIRTY (MF-30). One of the many missions of MF-30 is to aid Philippine coastal surveillance stations in detecting illegal activity. Such activities can include unlawful fishing, piracy, smuggling and intrusion. Rapid detection and a timely response to these activities are essential to the success of the coastal surveillance program. The US and Philippine



CWS Zambales on Capones Island, PI

governments are constantly working hand in hand to enhance the capabilities, coordination, and infrastructure of the coastal watch network. These efforts will result in a more robust monitoring ability and increased Philippine national security.

Operating out of Diosdado Macapagal International Airport, formerly Clark Airbase, CTG 72.2 was privileged to have MF-30 pilots and aircrew on-board during its missions off the coast of Luzon. They thoroughly explained and demonstrated their approach to maritime surveillance and the manner in which they employ their aircraft, the Britten-Norman Islander. The Islander and P-3C, flown by Combat Aircrew Eight of VP-4, conducted simultaneous airborne reconnaissance operations off the Philippine coast. With its speed and electronics' suite, the P-3C was able to detect



contacts of interest outside the coverage area of Philippine Coastal Watch Stations and vector the Islander inbound for a detailed visual inspection. This information was disseminated real-time to the Philippine coastal defense network providing a robust picture of maritime traffic and a faster reaction time to vessels approaching and operating within Philippine territorial seas.

While participating in BALIKATAN 2011, members of CTG 72.2 gained an appreciation of the efforts, capabilities, and professionalism of the Philippine Armed Forces. The relationships developed during the two-weeks of combined missions between VP-4 and MF-30 resulted in a close partnership between personnel of both countries. This partnership is vital in ensuring the continued cooperation and seamless interoperability that is essential to regional stability.